

1 Thessalonians

Chapter 4

Except for Jesus Christ, perhaps no one has influenced the world more than Saul, a Jewish tentmaker/attorney and Roman citizen. We find him in Jerusalem where Stephen, a champion for Jesus, is dressing down the religious brass for rejecting Christ as their Messiah. For this they make him the first Christian martyr.

Looking on we see Saul whose zeal, sanctioned by the high priest, revs him up to silence Jesus' first followers. Rooted in racism, to Jews, Gentiles were fuel for hell's fires (Acts 7:51-8:4, p. 988 GNB).

After Stephen's murder God temporarily ceases to deal with mankind through Israel in order to welcome non-Jews into an intimate relationship with Him. This will make the Jews jealous enough to, yet in the future, accept *en masse* Christ as their long-awaited Messiah (Romans 10:11-13, 17-21, p. 1024).

Jesus blinds Saul's eyes physically but opens them spiritually. Now as Paul, his unique "gospel of the grace of God" was revealed to him in person by our risen Lord who commissioned him as God's first envoy to Gentiles (Ephesians 3:3-6, p. 1062). His message: salvation is ours through childlike faith in what Christ did for us on the cross, not by our good behavior. None of Paul's predecessors knew this (Galatians 2:1-10, p. 1056; Ephesians 2:8-9, p. 1062).

This "secret" (or "mystery") is that Jesus' death permanently paid in full the penalty we deserve for our sins. Ergo, *the issue is not our sin; it's our faith!* Will we trust what Jesus did for us on the cross when He said, "Father, forgive them" and "It is finished" (2 Corinthians 5:17-21, p. 1048)?

Excommunicated from Judaism, Paul is the sole Bible writer to speak of the Rapture, not to be confused with "the Second Coming." Let's read Paul's "uplifting" news in 1 Thessalonians 4:1-18 (p. 1076).

"All We Need Is Love. Love Is All We Need."
1 Thessalonians 4:1-12

Paul levels no scolding, only loving encouragement and directions, based on his new gospel, which produce a wholesome, harmonious lifestyle (Galatians 5:1, 16-26, p. 1059).

Believers remain forever forgiven by God, but in this life we pay the natural consequences for our sins (Galatians 6:7-10, p. 1060). The Holy Spirit, living in us, helps

us make God-pleasing choices and say “no” to destructive ones.

DISCUSS: How do we make biblically-sound decisions?

Agape, ' Greek for *undeserved* love, the Love God has for all people that took our sins to the cross. It's Christ's Love in us, equipping us to love even our enemies (1 John 4:7-10, 19-21, p. 1117).

DISCUSS: Describe the *agape*' love that you've experienced.

You and I, inhabited by God's Spirit, have heaven's horsepower to live with integrity, initiative and contentment, attracting others to God by how we live (Colossians 4:5-6, p. 1073).

DISCUSS: How can we show that Christ in us makes a difference?

“Grace Is An Elevator, Not The Stairs” ***1 Thessalonians 4:13-18***

Today God deals with the world not through Israel but through “the Church, the Body of Christ,” believers from all ethnic groups (Galatians 3:19-29, p. 1057).

Some Thessalonians feared that their deceased loved ones would not be “caught up” when Christ returns. So Paul introduces the Rapture which will end God's long-suffering Church Age of Grace and precede the pouring out of His wrath against sin in the 7-year Tribulation.

Here and in a letter to Corinth Paul explains this future event told only to him by the resurrected Christ (1 Corinthians 15:51-54, p. 1044). At some date known only to the Father, Jesus will appear in the clouds, not on earth (as at His “Second Coming”). Bodies of the dead who trusted Him during the Church Age will rise from graves around the world, be given a new “heaven suit” (like Jesus') and be reunited in the air with their spirits who had been waiting in “Abraham's Bosom” (*sheol* in Hebrew, *hades* in Greek) (Luke 16:19-31). Then living believers are snatched up to be with Jesus forever.

Since believers are not “children of wrath,” Paul's words of comfort are their “blessed hope,” not wishful thinking or blind optimism. At the Rapture millions vanish in “the twinkling of an eye,” leaving behind billions of lost souls while heaven's newest arrivals are reuniting with family and friends who had trusted Jesus while on earth (Luke 23:39-43, p. 948; Titus 2:11-14, p. 1088).

No member of the Body of Christ will enter the Tribulation when God unleashes His justified anger toward Israel for rejecting their Messiah. Israelis will finally ask God to save them. He responds by crushing a multi-national army seeking to destroy the Jews.

Then occurs the actual “Second Coming of Christ” when Jesus returns not as Savior but as Judge and King, defeating Satan and Antichrist (Daniel 12:1-13, p. 798; Matthew 24:15-22, p. 879).

Working to earn your salvation is like trying but never reaching the top step of a downward escalator. But trusting in Christ is an express elevator to the penthouse to undeservedly join God’s family.

Our only afterlife options are to be (1) with God in heaven or (2) endless torment. Jesus’ death paid our sin debt in full. In faith we must place our trust in this liberating truth. Have you done that?

His Deal

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**B-I-B-L-E =
Basic Instructions Before Leaving Earth.
But why wait?**

- “For the **reward of sin is death**; but what **God freely gives is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord.**” (Romans 6:23).
- “**God puts people right** through their **faith in Jesus Christ**. God does this to all who believe in Christ, because there is no difference at all: **everyone has sinned** and is far away from God's saving presence. But by the **free gift of God's grace** all are put right with him through Christ Jesus, who sets them free. God offered him, so that by his blood he should become **the means by which people's sins are forgiven through their faith in him**. God did this in order to demonstrate that he is righteous. In the past he was patient and overlooked people's sins; but in the present time he deals with their sins, in order to demonstrate his righteousness. In this way God shows that he himself is righteous and that **he puts right everyone who believes in Jesus**” (Romans 3:22-26).
- “For it is **by God's grace** that you have been **saved through faith**. It is not the result of your own efforts, but **God's gift**, so that **no one can boast** about it.” (Ephesians 2:8-9).
- “If you **confess that Jesus is Lord** and **believe that God raised him** from death, **you will be saved**. For it is **by our faith** that we are **put right with God**; it is by our confession that we are saved” (Romans 10:9-10).
- “So those who **believe in the Son of God** have this testimony in their own heart; but **those who do not believe God**, have made a liar of him, because they have not believed what God has said about his Son. The testimony is this: **God has given us eternal life**, and this life has its source in his Son. Whoever has the Son has this life; **whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life**. I am writing this to you so that **you may know that you have eternal life**—you that believe in the Son of God” (1 John 5:10-13).

Online resources re Bible-predicted future events:

www.RaptureReady.com
www.joelrosenberg.com
www.GrantJeffrey.com
www.HalLindsey.com

“I’ve written as urgently and accurately as I know how. This is God’s generous truth; embrace it with both arms!” (1 Peter 5:12)